

10: SHAFTESBURY PARK ESTATE

Topography

The estate occupies a flat area of land at the edge of the River Thames flood plain just south of the slope rising to Clapham Common. Historically the area was occupied by Battersea Fields, the poorly drained common land covering the area as far as the river. The Heathwall Ditch ran along the foot of the slope and drained into the River Effra and Falcon Brook, making Battersea an island; present day Heathwall Street marks the line of this water course. A stream crossed the area on the line of present day Grayshott Road.

History

In the Middle Ages the area was known as Pig Hill because of the large number of piggeries in the area. The land was enclosed for market gardening from about the C16, to feed the growing population of London, and later became known as Poupart's Market Garden after the owner Samuel Poupart (the rail junction to the north is still known as Poupart's Junction).

The estate was built by the Artisans [or Artizans], Labourers and General Dwelling Company, a housing co-operative founded in 1867 by William Austin. The company was dedicated to providing decent accommodation for the working classes at a time when overcrowding and squalid living conditions were rife amongst the poor. Money was raised to undertake small developments for sale, the proceeds of which were then invested in larger estates, like Shaftesbury Park, for renting.

At the same time as the conception of the estate, the social reformer and peer, Lord Shaftesbury, was pushing legislation through parliament to improve the living and employment conditions of working people, and sponsoring philanthropic efforts to provide schooling for their children (the "ragged

schools"). Shaftesbury also had direct connections with the Artisans Co. of which he was a President from 1872-5.

The land for the Battersea estate was purchased in 1872; three other estates were developed elsewhere. The original concept was to combine new housing of various classes with social facilities such as meeting rooms, school rooms, a wash house and baths, and to provide integral open space (3 acres of the 40 acres bought). One facility certainly not to be provided on the estate was a public house, which was an attempt by the reformers behind the scheme to avoid the social problems of cheap alcohol. The estate layout and house designs were by the company's Architect and Surveyor, Robert Austin, formerly a carpenter with the company.

Financial difficulties, caused by poor accounting, led to replacement of the directors of the company and a change of approach during the construction of the estate. Rents and lease prices were raised, excluding many lower paid workers who were originally intended to benefit, and the planned area of open space was built over - Brassey Square in the centre of the estate. The estate was built between 1873 and 1877.

Buildings & townscape

The estate comprises about 1,200 two storey houses with gardens laid out in wide tree-lined streets. The estate houses are of four basic types or classes distinguished by the number of rooms (only the highest class originally had bathrooms). The street elevations are varied slightly to avoid monotony, creating generally attractive street frontages.

They are consistently of stock brick with red brick dressings and pitched slate roofs, which with the common architectural style, gives the estate a strong sense of identity and distinctiveness. The grid layout, with streets of varying lengths but always straight (except Eversleigh Road, which is aligned with the railway embankment), allows for easy movement throughout the estate. There is a sense of formality in the townscape arising from the grid layout and the repetition in the building frontages.

Though a visual consistency results from the use of the same materials and architectural motifs throughout the estate, richness is provided by the variety of detail in the facades. Thus, it is possible to describe a typical cottage to give an indication of the general appearance, but also to highlight those exceptional buildings which bring variety into the townscape.

Cottages are two storeys and two bays wide. They are of yellow stocks with dressings of stone and red and black banded arches. Roofs are of grey slate. They are arranged in terraces, with each street consisting of houses of the same design. Longer terraces (e.g. the east end of Elsley Road) may be broken up by the use of gables, towers or bays, but with detail repeated and symmetry retained. These features avoid the appearance of seemingly endless rows of monotonous identical houses.

Regularly repeated features are timber sash windows, often twinned on the first floor with stone moulded lintels over. Most have sidelights. Blind pointed arches, picked out in contrasting brick, are used over some windows and doors. Brackets support window cills, which originally (rarely now) had cast iron pot retainers.

Gothic style porches supported on columns with corbels, often coupled, mark many of the entrances, above many of which are pointed gables containing the badge of the Artisans Co. and the date of development. Others have simple pointed arch door surrounds. The timber doors have chamfered stiles and fielded or herringbone lower panels below glazed upper panels. The roof eaves are usually supported by brackets. Two opposing terraces in Elsley Road are listed (grade II) for their group value (nos.37-71 and 38-72).

Two detached houses stand out for being larger than the others - at the triangular junctions of Eversleigh Road with Ashbury Road and Kingsley Street. However, they exhibit the same detailing as the humbler cottages with the added features of square bays and stair towers. Larger houses of two storeys with basement, and entrance steps, occupy part of the east side of Grayshott Road (nos.62-86), some retaining their original railings.

The Board School and the mansion block, almost facing on Ashbury Road, stand out because of their height and bulk. They were intended to frame the central open space, which unfortunately was abandoned. Shaftesbury Park Chambers is finely detailed and picks up on the detail and scale of the cottages, with the curious addition of railings in an Art Nouveau style rather than the gothic that prevails elsewhere. There are corner shops throughout the estate and a short terrace of shops in Tyneham Road (nos.35-47), some of which have been converted to residential use.

The entrance to the estate in Grayshott Road is emphasised by two corner turrets on the end houses of the two short terraces (nos.32-42 and 45-55).

These are, unusually, three storeys and are listed (grade II). They are yellow stock with stone and red and black brick dressings. The ground floors have extended shop fronts (no.45 converted to residential) with Doric style pilasters. The octagonal spires with three faces have sash windows at first and second floor, with stone lintels to the first floor and Gothic arch heads to the second floor. The spires have patterned slates in diminishing courses.

War damage has led to infilling of gap sites throughout the estate, although this is generally in the form of small two storey plain modern cottages, distinct from the originals, but not detracting from the quality of the estate overall.

Green elements

Most of the streets were planted with trees when laid out, mainly planes and limes. Some of these original trees still survive, though many grew too large and have been replaced with smaller ornamental species since the war. Gardens generally are too small to allow significant planting, though front boundary hedges are still common.

Negative elements

The extent of small scale change to the appearance of houses has been limited, with ownership of the majority of properties by a single body (the Peabody Trust). However, there are instances of inappropriate alteration to front elevations, such as replacement windows and doors, painting of brickwork, and unsympathetic boundary treatments. The Council now has additional controls over such changes in this conservation area.

This character statement is intended to give an overview of the development and current character of the conservation area; it is not intended to be prescriptive, nor to be a summary of planning constraints or an inventory of individual buildings or other features whether listed or otherwise.